

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT: *The paper approaches the concepts that are specific to the study of institutions from a systemic and actional perspective. When defining the institutions we have to start from the social actions system. The social actions also ensure the criterion for the institutions typology. Then the components of the institution are being analyzed. The roles of the institutional structures were treated next. The general characteristics of the institutional systems were presented afterwards. The transition from the theoretical aspects to the pragmatic ones is done through the presentation of the leadership. The efficiency of the social institutions is measured by the ability of the management to integrate them into the environment.*

KEY WORDS: *institution; organization; group; action; efficiency; environment.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *Z13*

Each of us interacts with the others all our lives within institutions and organizations. It is a known fact that we are generally born in maternities, learn in different types of schools, earn our living working in companies, we are active members or just subscription payers of unions and parties, we get married in churches and town halls and get treated in clinics and hospitals. Because of this reason everybody has a minimum knowledge of them. These facts are part of the common knowledge.

The transition from common knowledge to scientific knowledge is based on operating with exact knowledge. At the scientific knowledge level we talk about the concepts of „institution” and „organization”. Thus, Ion Tudosescu (1976, pp. 11-29; 1978, pp. 9-34) in two separate studies that continue and complete each other, combining the perspective of a modern systemic methodology with a praxiological view of the social phenomena shows that the social system, as a system of relations is actually a system of social actions. Continuing the analysis of the social structures, the author mentioned above shows that there are two types of social relations: *actional social relations* and *conditional social relations*. The conditional social relations are

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conditions which are necessary for the foundation of actional social relations. *The general social actions system* is made up of their synthesis. The actional social relations are made up of actions that transform nature, actions that transform society and actions that transform the individual. The latter actions are instructive-educative, medical and health protecting. All the actions mentioned so far are *direct social actions* because they produce efficiency directly. There are also *indirect social actions* that potentiate the efficiency of the first ones. Among the latter we can exemplify transports, communications, services, actions to change and perfect social relations, actions to elaborate and perfect norms and decisional and managing actions (see Figure 1). Out of the conditional social relations category we can mention economical relations, ideological relations and institutional relations. These conditional social relations make up the situational frame that condition the way that the actional relations work. Farther more, the situational frame is also subordinating *the means of the action*. Among these means there are material, logic/scientific and ideological/conceptual resources. Closely connected to the later ones are the *norms of the action*. Initially they are gained by experience and tradition; afterwards, they can be elaborated and perfected according to the actual and dynamic situational context that the social action is in. Also, *the motivational grounds of the action* are established in regard to this situational set. The motivational grounds of the social action are a combination of psychic motivation (affective and rational), teleological motivation (interests and goals) and axiological motivation (appreciation and validation).

All these actional components are valuable only in connection to the elementary terms represented by *the object of the action* and *the subject or agent of the action*. The object of the action is represented by the existential areas that the actional agent refers to. The actional agent is represented by communities, groups and individuals that are involved in the actional process. In order to obtain the desired efficiency of the social action, it has to be taken into account that a special importance must be given to its phases. Thus, going from intent to act has to pass through *command*, which is made up of *decision* and *managing*. In this way *the execution* is launched and it finalizes with a *product*. The author shows that the management attributes and implicitly the responsibility for the decisions made are entrusted (or self assumed) by a leading group, a political party or a special social category. Both the liability and the social responsibility of this managing group increase qualitatively as well as quantitatively together with being promoted to a higher hierarchical step of the respective social system. These social actions are intertwining with all the other types of social actions of the respective social system.

The same author – Ion Tudosescu, in the second study that we considered, starts from the observation that the efficiency of contemporary societies is determined by organizational improvement of all the working mechanisms, at all the structural levels of the social system. The social action is causally, structurally, functionally and dynamically determined by the hierarchical level of the social system at which it takes place. Under the conditions of labour division and the need for cooperation of the social agents, within the social action there is a need for defining and observing some norms and rules encoded by the action. These norms and rules are both coercive and incentive reported to the needs, aspirations, and interests of the organizational

members. They also regulate the statuses and roles of the individuals within the organization. Also, the relations between the individuals, the relations of the individuals with the organization and the relations of the organization with its environment are also regulated. The need for norms and rules is required by the fact that the relations between the individuals are and must be actional cooperation relations. Competition is not enough because the relations between individuals are animated by complex interests and needs. Through their action, the organizational structures ensure their relative autonomy and contribute to the consolidation or the collapse of a certain social system.

The relations between members of organizational structures are:

1. *formal relations* are relatively stabile, determined by cohesion, goals and duration of the structure and are coded in norm systems that have the necessary means to implement them and in this way they are controllable;
2. *informal relations* are relatively instable relations, made up at random, eventually for momentary goals, without being coded in norms, they are implemented as group opinions and are uncontrollable.

The existence of these types of relations are between members of organizations are determined by the existence of specific groups. These groups intertwine and act differently. In order to get the actions of these groups to converge their divergent orientation must be avoided; it could lead to the collapse of the organization from the inside.

In order to ensure the internal cohesion of the organizational structure and to maximize its efficiency, the norms are elaborated rigorously and systemically grouped based on logical and operational criteria like:

1. *mutual coherence and consistence*, meaning to form a unitary norm system;
2. *hierarchical structuring* meaning that it must comprise of principles, fundamental norms, secondary norms, provisions, indications and recommendations;
3. *precision and inexpensiveness* that is obtained by stating directly and clearly the content and the applicability;
4. *elasticity and simplicity* it represents the necessary and useful minimum in order to ensure conformity but also the freedom of initiative as well as the improvement through new requirements;
5. *the distribution of competences* to elaborate and adopt norms, as well as controlling their application, on hierarchical levels as well as inside the same level on different compartments.

The norm system, being elaborated in such a manner, is governing the organizational relations beyond the individual adhesion of the actional agents. Through the force of the norms, the organizational structures gain an existential statute.

The organizational system of a society, considering the conditions of social dynamics, is made up of two fundamental levels that of social institutions and that of social organizations. These two fundamental levels contain structures made at other levels, from the lowest up to the highest, like state and international structures – EU, NATO and UN.

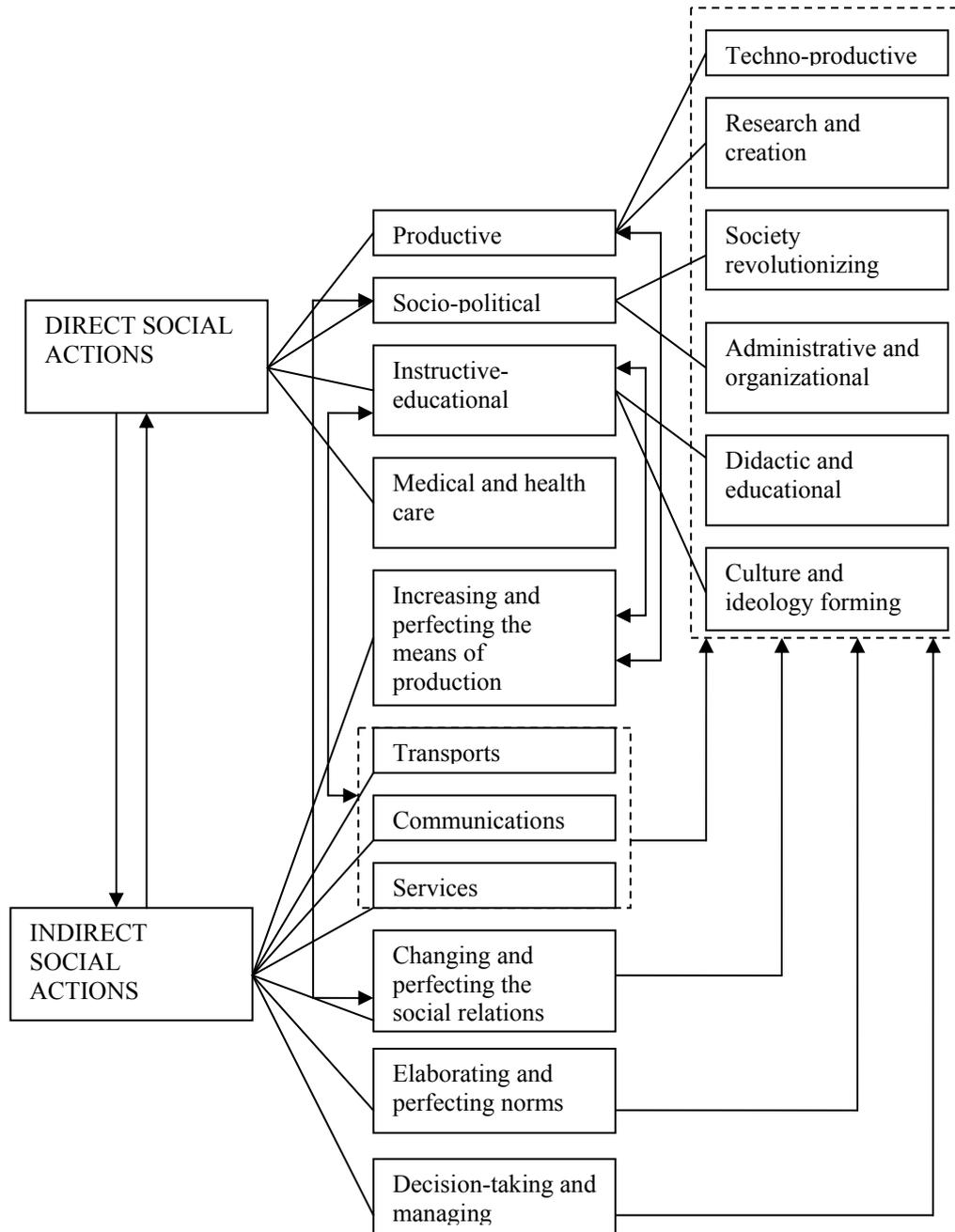


Figure 1. The Social Actions System (Tudosescu, 1976, p. 27)

Ion Tudosescu considers social institutions to be organizational structures with formal character (their work is based on norm systems establishes on tradition or

elaborated deliberately), that the groups or the human communities make concisely but out of necessity, to serve as means of gaining superior degrees of efficiency in their relations as well as in the goods, material and spiritual values production activities (Tudosescu, 1978, p. 15).

As it is easy to see from the above definition, the cause for implementing institutions is necessity of superior efficiency in the groups' and communities' relations and activities. The institutions are made up of the members of the group or of the collectivity, the collective chose or enforced by a decision, professionalized specialists and personnel of the administrative and technical department. Once the institutions are established, they become relatively autonomous in their activity. Their members enrol in these institutions as a result of their offer of existential insurance, so as they can afford covering for the living necessities and professional, social and family achievement. The members of the institution compulsory adhere to the activity of the institution, regardless of whether they understand its significance and the social role.

Ion Tudosescu, as we have seen already, uses as a criterion to separate the different types of social institution the variety of social actions carried on by them. Thus the social institutions can be: political, administrative, juridical, educational, medical, religious and others. It is more than obvious that all these types of institutions are structured systemically and hierarchically.

Ioan Mihăilescu (2003, pp. 174-194) starts by distinguishing the three concrete concepts of: *social structure*, *social organization* and *social institution*. The first concept the social structure refers to the composition of the social system and is defined as being a set of relations including a variety of elements (social positions, groups, social classes, social institutions) possessing qualities of totality, transformation and self adjustment (Mihăilescu, 2003, p. 174). The second concept, the social organization refers to the functioning of the social system and it is defined as a system of roles and social institutions, behaviour patterns, means of action and social control that ensures the satisfaction of the needs of a certain community, coordinates the actions of its members, regulates the relations among them and ensures the stability and the cohesion of the colectivity (Mihăilescu, 2003, p. 174). The organization is the subject of the organization theory. The author considers that the main elements of the social organization are the social roles and statuses, the behaviour patterns, the means of action and the social control. The third concept, the social institutions are defined as behavioural systems and relations that regulate the life and the activity of the individuals. And then he adds that the institution is a structured and functional set of norms and values that differentiate it from the social organization.

Synthesizing the references of the literature he considers that by social institution we can understand a system of social relations that is organized based on common values and where there are used certain procedures in order to satisfy particular fundamental social needs of a social collectivity. The author explains how the institutionalization of social needs is achieved. The relations and the practice of several behaviors for a long period of time establish them as being **standardized behaviors**. Then they are encoded into laws, thing that is equivalent to the institutionalization of social relations. Thus, behaviours become expected, shaped,

predictable and accepted in a given social system. As a result, the statuses and the roles are also institutionalized. This doesn't mean that all the roles corresponding to some statuses are identical. The individual differences, especially those related to the personality, lead to the personalization of roles. The personalization of the role influences the institutional role form elevating it to compromising it.

Ioan Mihăilescu considers that the institutions can be defined and characterized by there elements. Among the elements that the author considered are: objective, functions, means, symbols, code of conduct, value and norm systems that are specific. These elements are important because they ensure efficiency. As a measure of efficient operation of an institution the degree of achievement of its goal and its objectives must be taken into consideration. The efficiency of an institution is also dependent on the way it is organized, on its relations with its social environment and on the implementation of several conditions like:

1. the clear definition of its goal and objectives in relation to the needs to be covered;
2. rational organization of activities on compartments and roles;
3. the depersonalization of institutional roles that would give the primacy to objectives achievement;
4. social acceptance of the means and procedures used, as they have to be in accordance with the recognized values;
5. social recognition of the utility of the institution through its acceptance by the social actors;
6. the relations between institutions and institutional autonomy must influence each other in keeping with the functional autonomy.

The diversity of institutions requires that we establish a typology. The author uses two criteria for the realization of the typology of the social institutions. The first criterion is firmness of the regulations. So we have:

- formal institutions, where the goal, the objectives, the procedures, the organization and the roles are established and regulated precisely;
- informal institutions, where the activities and the roles are vaguely regulated allowing for their personalization.

It can be argued that this typology has a logical problem. If the norms are the constituting elements of the social institution through which they are defined and characterised, they must be regulated in such a way that standardised behaviour patterns must be ensured. As a result, the vague regulation of the activities and roles contradicts the norms. The second typology criterion is the nature of the activities. At this criterion the differences compared to Tudosescu are minimal, only the explanation is a bit different. The following types are considered:

- economical institutions, that comprise the institutions that activate into the production, the circulation and the selling of goods, services and work organizing;
- political and juridical institutions, that activate into the conquering, maintaining and exercising the power;

- cultural and educative institutions, that activate for the maintaining of the cultural tradition and the development of the cultural creation, as well as for the socialization of the individuals;
- religious institutions, that organize the activities of the cults and the relations of the believers with the clergy.

Mircea Agabrian (2003, p. 227) considers that the social institution represents a stabile and persistent bunch of values, statuses, roles, groups and organizations that work together to meet societies' basic demands in a particular area of social life. In this definition, as we can see, the criterion that separates the distinctive type of social institutions is the need that they meet. As a result there will be political and economical institutions, family and education, the medical system etc. We must also point out the fact that in this definition the institution is made up of groups and organizations.

Norman Goodman (undated, pp. 71-74) refers to institutions in identical terms. For him, the social institutions are characterized by a relatively stabile bunch of values, norms, statuses, role prescriptions, social groups and organizations that are connected to a certain area of human activity. Further on the author links the institution to the specific needs. Goodman assumes from the functionalist theories the social institutions typology and it includes economy, education, family, politics and religion. In this paper the author only considers two characteristics of the institutions. It is about tendencies, the tendency to resist to changes and the tendency to be interdependent.

Richard Jenkins defines the institutions as being behaviour patterns in a certain context that consolidated over time and as being the way in which things are done. Their knowledge and recognition is due to the fact that they represent norms practiced in a certain social situation. The author underlines the fact that the institutions are part of the social construction of reality, being imagined but not imaginary. Because of their existence the institutions generate important consequences and are constraining. As such they are products and components of human actions. The precursors of institutions are habits and routine. During institutionalization routine the way in which things are done is reached. As a result of turning these practices into mandatory patterns, deviation from them attracts penalties and so the social control is expressed as the way things must to be done.

In a complex and uncertain world, institutions arrange social life, offer predictability and allow the actors to use a lower level of attention than a complex social world would require. They are transmitted from generation to generation through language. The author's conclusion is that the institutions are sources and places for identification. The institutional identification of individuals, just like the status, means both rights and duties, namely what I can expect from others and what others expect of me.

The thing that must be noted from these explanations is the universality of behaviour institutionalization. The thing that isn't shown is that any behaviour is first of all what is done and this is the support for how it is done.

Carmen Bulzan (2008, pp. 136-141) entitles a subchapter Institutions and organizations, but doesn't approach the social institution, preferring to deal only with the social organization. We could believe that the author might consider them to be synonymous.

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